

Knitwear Repairs

By Emily L. Ocker

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I am retired and now knit for pure pleasure. Before nearly 25 years of instructing knitting and other needlework subjects, I repaired knitwear as a home business. Throughout the fifties and sixties I used my knitting skills to earn the money to purchase antique needlework books, laces, embroideries and beadwork. My Reknitting Service was the major part of my personal income at that time. I repaired many cashmere sweaters damaged by moths and cigarette burns, shortened hundreds of fine machine-knit skirts, and made other alterations, serving customers of stores, dry cleaners and knit shops. These are the basic procedures I used most often on both machine-knits and hand-knits.....

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A damage should not necessarily be judged by its size. On heavy sweaters a large hole may result from one or two breaks in the yarn, while in finer fabrics many broken yarns will often result in a comparatively small hole. How many breaks in the yarn is what matters - not the size of the hole.

Obtaining the necessary yarn for knitwear repairs is usually a simple matter for small damaged areas, but more difficult for large areas. With hand-knitted garments there is almost always some leftover yarn. This saves time and effort necessary when repair yarn must be removed from the garment.

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**SNAGS -**

A snag is a loop of yarn which has been caught or pulled but not broken, causing a tightening of the adjoining stitches along the row. Snags should never be cut. It may appear to be a serious damage to repair, but even multiple snags of this type are not serious.

.....To Repair a Snag.....

Insert a tapestry needle into the pulled loop and lift gently until the yarn becomes taut. Mark the exact center of the loop by inserting a small pin through the yarn at the point where it goes over the needle. Remove needle and insert it down and under the first loop to the left of the pin along the pulled yarn and lift

up until the pin lies flat on the surface of the fabric. Then, working from right to left, pick up each succeeding loop, being careful to watch the tension of the yarn as each loop is released. No excess yarn should remain when the last loop is released. Reverse work and proceed in the same manner on the other side of the pin. Remove pin. If there is excess yarn, loosen any tight stitches to make them uniform.

Some single broken yarns may be the result of a snag and the gathered yarn on either side of the break must be released as with a simple snag. With the point of a tapestry needle, unravel several stitches beyond the hole on each side. Take these yarn ends to the back of the fabric to be secured later. This will tend to enlarge the hole but is necessary in order to provide ends long enough to work in. Now thread a tapestry needle with repair yarn and working from the right side of the fabric, insert needle several stitches to the right of the opening and leave a short end to be secured later on the wrong side. Join top and bottom loops by grafting. Work in all ends.

If a broken yarn resulting from a snag also results in one or more dropped stitches, and runs in both directions, these dropped stitches must be repaired first. Use a crochet hook suitable for the weight of the yarn and hook up these stitches and secure the top loop with a pin. Then proceed with the repair of the single broken strand.

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REPAIRING HOLES -

.....Where to obtain repair yarn.....

An easy way to obtain repair yarn is to clip a single yarn in a knit row of a sweater sleeve, partially removing the cuff, and to unravel the amount of yarn needed from the sleeve. To repair this "damage", unravel another row of sleeve fabric, clipping it at the seam "point" and after removing the kinks, use this length while still fastened to the sleeve to replace cuff. Graft, carefully matching the tension, firming the tension slightly as the seam point is reached, so there is a yarn end long enough to work in on wrong side of sleeve. (This technique shortens the sleeve slightly, but careful blocking should eliminate any discrepancy. However, if sweater has been knitted at a loose gauge, a

corresponding number of rows would have to be removed from the other sleeve as well.)

Repair yarn may also be obtained from the underside of pockets, from facings, and from the back of a sweater near the underarm. Assembly yarn can be used for repairs if it matches exactly, and seams replaced with a close match. Before using unraveled yarns, remove the kinks by dipping strands in hot water and patting dry on a towel.

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.....To Reknit Large Holes.....

Holes can be filled in with knitting-like stitches, or if quite large, with actual knitted patches. To repair the hole, carefully unpick the broken strands to form a rectangle with ends long enough to turn back. Thread each yarn end into a tapestry needle and secure on the wrong side... (If yarn end is quite short, first insert needle where you want the yarn to go, then thread needle and draw yarn end into place.)

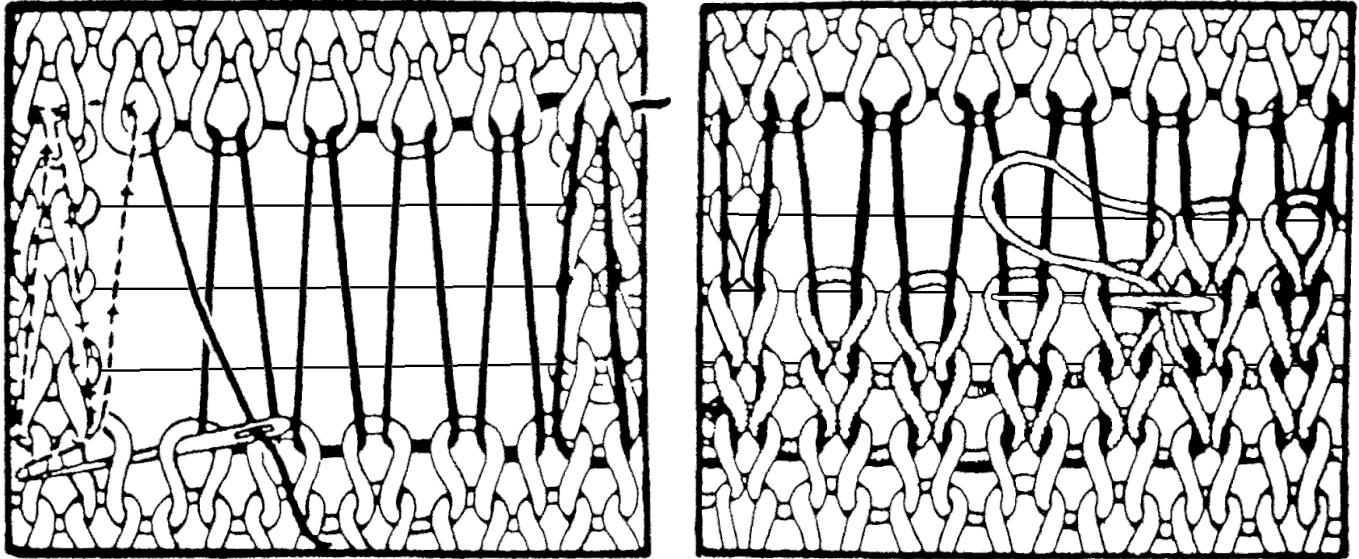
.....How to Use Guide Threads.....

To reknit a large hole, guide threads are necessary and serve as a foundation for the reconstruction of the fabric. Take a length of contrasting sewing thread. With a fine needle secure thread end several stitches beyond the bottom right corner of the hole. Unite the top and bottom loops with long vertical stitches in the manner of grafting, but do not draw too tightly as the repair stitches will be built around them. Keep work flat. (Work can be basted to a piece of stiff paper or placed in an embroidery hoop if necessary.) Now make horizontal threads, one for each row to be reknit.

With a length of matching repair yarn, build new stitches on these guide threads. Secure yarn end several stitches to the right of the hole, beginning at lower right corner, and bring up through the first loop. Take needle right to left behind two vertical threads and above first horizontal thread and back down into first loop again; bring needle up into first loop to the left. Continue in this manner, forming a row of stitches. A turn is made at the end of the newly-formed row by catching the edge stitch of the original fabric. Reverse work and work second

row, working right to left. (It is easier to form the return rows by reversing the work.) Match the tension carefully as you continue to fill in the hole, row by row. Secure yarn ends on wrong side. Snip and carefully remove all guide threads.

This process is easier to do than it is to describe!

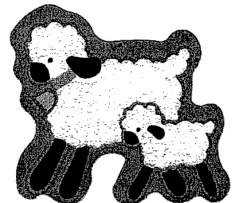


Diagrams adapted from  
Mary Thomas's Knitting Book - 1938

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I realize I've only touched on simple Stockinette fabric. If you need to repair a complicated fabric, take a deep breath and give it your best shot.... Whatever you do, it will be better than a hole!

Throughout my life I've thoroughly enjoyed sharing with others the knitting and needlework know-how so generously shared with me. May we all continue the process - and "share the wealth".

Emily



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